

“Lord, Open Our Eyes” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent 4 March 19, 2023

- I. **John 9:35-38** –[Jesus asked,] “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶He answered, “And who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?”³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you.”³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped Him.
- II. **Art and Sandy were roommates** at Columbia University in the early 1960s.
 - a. Unfortunately, right after he got started with college, Sandy went through a major crisis – he was diagnosed with severe glaucoma that would soon leave him completely blind.
 - i. As a young man, it hit him very hard... he went into a depression... moved back home to Buffalo and completely cut off contact with his college friends.
 - ii. Art wasn’t letting his friend just give up on becoming a lawyer – so he bought a plane ticket and flew to Buffalo to knock on the door unannounced.
 - iii. It took a while, but Art convinced Sandy to go back to college with him and promised to be right by his side through it all – he wouldn’t let him down.
 - b. Art kept his promise, faithfully taking Sandy wherever necessary, and basically became his eyes for him.
 - i. He never wanted Sandy to feel alone – and even though his disease threw him into a world of darkness, Art was always there.
 1. He even nicknamed himself “darkness” – and he would tell Sandy, “Ok, darkness is going to read to you now.”
 - ii. Everywhere life went, Art and Sandy went together, until the day he guided Sandy through Grand Central Station.
 1. He let go of Sandy’s arm and told him he had to go... He left his friend totally alone and terrified.
 2. Sandy bumped and stumbled – knocking into people – and even falling down and getting a gash on his shin.
 3. After a couple of hours of complete chaos... he got on the right subway train and got off at the right stop... and then bumped into someone else who apologized... it was his friend, Art.
 4. He had followed Sandy quietly all the way home, making sure he was going to be okay, but also giving him the gift of independence that he would never find on his own.
 5. Sandy would later say, “That moment was the spark that caused me to live a completely different life, without fear, without doubt. For that I am tremendously grateful to my friend.”

- c. Sandy would go on to graduate, work for the White House under President Johnson, and even get graduate degrees at Harvard and Oxford.
 - i. But before he became a success, when he was still at Oxford, Sandy got a call from Art.
 - ii. This time Art was the one who needed help... because he started a new band with a friend, and he needed \$400 to record his first album.
 - iii. Sandy only had \$404 in his bank account, but without any hesitation he sent the money.
 - iv. Art and Paul's first album wasn't a success right away, but one of the songs, "The Sounds of Silence," made it to #1 on the pop charts.
 - 1. Maybe you remember the first line, "Hello darkness, my old friend," – that's what Sandy used to say to his friend Art whenever he greeted him.
 - 2. Simon and Garfunkel became superstars, but Art said that being friends with Sandy Greenberg and supporting him made him a better person.¹
- d. This story reminds me of Jesus walking beside us through all the ups and downs of our lives... it's a beautiful picture of commitment and friendship.
- e. Yet, on occasion, Jesus takes it a step further than walking with us, but He provides a miracle to bring glory to God.

III. **The Gospel lesson today has Jesus stirring up a hornets' nest.**

- a. It began a couple of chapters prior in John 7, as Jesus walks into the temple area and calls out to everyone who will listen, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)
 - i. He is calling on the people to "believe" in Him – the Savior.
- b. After sparring with the religious leaders, He makes them really mad by claiming to be God... as He says, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58-59) and they picked up rocks to stone Him for blasphemy.
- c. The next thing on His agenda is going up to a man born blind, making some mud out of His spit and caking it on his eyes, then telling him to go wash in the pool of Siloam... and afterward the man is able to see for the first time in his entire life.
 - i. Now, rather than celebrating, people seem to be rather concerned – and they bring him before the religious leaders to give the story...
Yes, Jesus made mud (He broke the Sabbath command not to work)
- d. After a few back and forth issues with the leaders, they kick the man out, and Jesus finds him and asks if he believes in Him, the Son of Man... and the man says, "Lord, I believe," and worshiped Jesus.
- e. The man born blind was not only given his sight, but he was given the eyes to see and believe that Jesus is our God and Savior.

- f. Throughout all these other chapters, all we see is blindness – spiritual blindness – even though Jesus was right there, they could not see Him.
- g. Sometimes we suffer from blindness as well – it might not be an outright loss of faith – but we wonder where Jesus is during the trials.

IV. **Not everyone is healed... at least yet.**

- a. So many of you have very serious health conditions – and some of these are not getting better without a miracle like we read about today.
- b. Sometimes it becomes very difficult to sense the presence of God when we are suffering – and may even have us questioning God in the worst of times.
- c. Imagine Sandy, blind in Grand Central Station... stumbling along with the fear and anxiety closing in... but all along his friend was right there.
 - i. We also have a Savior who is right there with us, even when we aren't too sure – or we wonder why we aren't healed.
- d. I don't know about you, but I would be so excited and grateful to see a miraculous healing... and yet, it is just as impressive to see a person go through trials and suffering with their eyes turned to Jesus in faith.
 - i. Watching people who have deadly diseases, stuck in bed or limited in walking, caregivers supporting and helping the best they can – even though it will never be enough – and all the while glorifying God and worshiping Him through it all.
 - ii. That is a true miracle to me, as God shows His glory through the pain and suffering in the faith of His children.
- e. Even Jesus Himself didn't shy away from pain and suffering – as He went through the torture and ultimately the death on a cross, so that our fate would be sealed... through faith He will never leave us or forsake us.
- f. No, we may not be healed in this earthly journey, but we will be.
 - i. We fully trust in the life to come without pain and suffering as a part of everyday life
 - ii. Our healing will be complete... and in the full and visual presence of our Savior.
- g. Today we are reminded of the presence of Jesus as He opens our eyes to Him... in faith...Amen.

¹ Adapted from Sanford D. Greenberg's memoir: Hello Darkness, My Old Friend: How Daring Dreams and Unyielding Friendship Turned One Man's Blindness into an Extraordinary Vision for Life (Post Hill Press, 2020).